

Midwinter Meditation

by Rachael Ikins

2012, This strange winter of little snow, where our hardiness zone now allows for peach trees, began for me, with my solo art exhibition as a visual artist other than a photographer, at the music store at a nearby mall. My spouse discovered the venue when a small sign declared "art inside" as we passed their window walking one day last year. Another day we entered the store. We marveled at the shiny ebony, mahogany, or inlaid surfaces of pianos and organs that glistened with invitation to fingers to touch and stroke, stark keys in black and white that evoke voices soft or soaring. And yes, there was all the wall space for artwork. The owner declared that those who come to study music or to take organ or piano lessons in this roomy, inviting space with puzzle tables and chess boards too, love to look at the artwork. While he is positive he doesn't know one end of a paint brush from the other, Bob swears that the presence of the artwork enhances the music. He is an organist.

A week or so ago, Bob flew to Anaheim, CA for a conference. When he returned, he shared this story. That there had been a physician at the music conference who affirmed that learning and regular playing of a musical instrument would add seven years to anyone's life. While my use of this example is anecdotal and not shored up with footnotes, I have to say that it is not the first time I've heard of the therapeutic value of music.

Today we had stopped to chat with him. I had sold a picture, and he encouraged me to bring more to hang. My exhibit includes wall art, artist trading cards and chapbooks of poetry.

At one point I was standing at the front counter speaking with a sales clerk. She asked me

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shyly were the books for sale? I told her they were and how much. She proceeded to make a confession to me, that she is a "frustrated short story writer". So, we conversed a bit about writing. I suggested she visit my website for some how to ideas about the craft, and then she said "You know, you really inspired me." I replied with a thank you. She continued in a way I did not expect. "You know your painting of the tree frog? The one with those round suction cup feet? Don't they have the coolest feet?" I agreed with her. She went on to explain that well, after studying my painting awhile, when she left work she detoured to a pet shop instead of driving straight home. She walked into the back of the store where the multifaceted tanks of underwater life teem, the exotic salt water denizens, scores of humble feeder fish, tropicals of all sizes and shapes and tanks of reptiles and yes, amphibians. She proceeded directly to the frog habitats. This pet shop carries a species of poison dart frog. They do not feed the frogs whatever it is they eat in their natural habitat of rainforest that enables them to create poison. "Because of your painting," she said, "I picked up as much literature as I could find about these frogs and I learned new things." They carry the same kind of frog I had used as subject for the painting "Jeepers, Creeping". She told me that in nature, eating what they do, they are the carriers of the most potent poison on the planet.


And that struck me. No, she didn't buy a painting. But my art touched her in a deeper secret place. It made her yearn to learn and grow. None of us exists separate from others. All the lives that populate this amazing planet are interconnected in some way. Thus it behooves us each to act responsibly and to consider the consequences or impact our actions will have on others around us, be they trees, elephants, frogs, ospreys, fungii, fruit flies, or human sixth grade boys.

It is a kind of existential thread, that silly "if a tree falls in the forest and nobody is there to hear it, does it still make noise?" You never know when you create art who it will touch or how or when...even if at all...creating art is two things. For an artist it is a have-to phenom like breathing. We are makers. The other thing is: to create a piece of art is an act of faith.

The artists who make music release me to do my visual art, for in their melodies and lyrics I

find solace from the self-critic and the censor inside my own head. I hear sad tales both adult art and music students carry, of scars from harsh or ignorant childhood teachers, scars that last into adulthood. In mid life, some lucky few, at least, have enough courage to pick up the pen or brush or bow one more time, to start over before it is too late. Nobody is as hard on us as the person who resides in our own selves.

My message this day is this: help each other. Empower others through your own self expression and we will all emerge the better for it.



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